

HABS
VA,
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U.S. Post Office and Court House
(Lynchburg City Hall Annex)
901 Church St.
Lynchburg (Independent City)
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1206

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. POST OFFICE AND COURT HOUSE
(Lynchburg City Hall Annex)

HABS No. VA-1206

Original Name: U.S. Post Office and Court House

Present Name: Lynchburg City Hall Annex

Location: 901 Church Street, Lynchburg (Independent City), Virginia,
southeast side of Church Street, facing Church Street,
between Ninth and Tenth Streets

Present Owner: City of Lynchburg

Present Occupant: Municipal government

Present Use: Municipal government administrative offices

Significance: This building derives its significance due to its importance in the political history of Lynchburg and as an example of architecture of James Knox Taylor. To quote from S. Allen Chambers, Jr., the senior architectural historian in the Historic American Buildings Survey and noted Lynchburg expert, "The building is typical of Taylor's work, and of much governmental architecture of its time- a handsome interpretation of the early twentieth century Classical Revival style." (p 361, Lynchburg; An Architectural History, Charlottesville, 1981)

BUILDING II

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1909-1912
2. Architect: James Knox Taylor, supervising architect of the Treasury from 1897-1912.
3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Complete information not obtainable. However, Allen Chambers, in Lynchburg: An Architectural History, notes that demolition of the previous building was conducted by J. E. & A.L. Pennock Contractors of Philadelphia and that the same firm "dug deeper into the steep bank of Court House Hill to provide for its larger replacement." Photographs in the National Archives show that the contractors reused some portions of the basement walls and foundations, and old bricks served as backing for the limestone walls.
4. Original plans and construction: The structure's exterior appearance has not been significantly altered. Major interior changes include renovation of the original "auto and truck vestibule" into offices and removal of the revolving door at the main entrance. Visitors to the building often still wonder "if it used to be a Post Office." The original, signed plans are located in the city engineer's office. Also, 28 drawings of the building are preserved at the National Archives.
5. Alterations and additions: Plans of interior renovations occurring during 1963, 1969, 1971 and 1972, are on file in the city engineer's office.

B. Historical Context:

The structure was built as a U.S. Post Office and Court House and was occupied as such by federal offices until the new post office was completed across the street in 1933. The municipal government moved into the renovated building in 1934. It remains as the Lynchburg City Hall in 1981. When City Hall moves across the street in early 1982, the building will continue to be occupied by municipal government offices, with no major interior changes planned at this time.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

Chambers refers to the building as "typical of Taylor's work and of much governmental architecture of its time -- a handsome, refined version of the early-twentieth-century Classical Revival style," and retaining features of the beaux-arts such as "rustication, prominent cornice lines and an overall symmetry."

The three-story building, with full basement, is 120 feet, 5 inches by 82 feet, 1 inch. Chambers describes it:

Its symmetrical facade is divided into three large sections, emphasized by the similar divisions of the prominent hipped roof, originally covered with tile, now with metal. Each section has three bays: the central entrance section is slightly recessed between the end units. The first floor is faced in rusticated limestone, and its finestrations and entrance ways are framed with incised voussoirs. This seemingly solid stone, however, is only a skin over the brick and steel-frame construction of the building. ... To contrast with the rusticated ground floor, the stone of the upper two floors is smooth faced. To the left of the building is a one-story wing, 27 feet, 6 inches by 47 feet, 2 inches.

B. Description of Interior:

Chambers describes the interior as "well appointed," and continues, "Partitions on the first story are six-inch terra cotta, and on all floors light Georgia Creole marble was specified for borders, with dark Georgia Creole for baseboards." The original plans also noted the types of marble to be used in corridors and specified corridor floors of terrazzo, walls of plaster finish, wood door trims and ceilings furred down. Toilets also were built with marble wainscot and borders and terrazzo floors. Wood floors and oak chair rails were specified for offices. Elaborate trim, moldings and wainscoting of golden grained oak millwork adorn all original windows, doors, and walls, respectively, and are especially sophisticated in the third floor courtroom/council chamber.

Corridor doors have "obscure glass panels, "according to the plans, and others solid panels, with exterior doors having clear glass panels.

The interior faces of exterior walls are furred with two-inch terra cotta. Fireproofing around columns is three-foot terra cotta.

Mechanical systems have been completely modernized, most notably in 1963 when air conditioning was installed and in 1980 when the oil burning furnace was removed in favor of an energy-efficient gas furnace. Also in 1980, insulation was added, with particular attention to the basement mechanical systems.

Of particular interest in the lobby, directly in front of the main entrance, is an oil on canvas painting done in 1934 for the exact location where it remains today. Scaisbrooke L. Abbot, affectionately referred to by his friends as "Brookie," painted the mural as part of a WPA project. Abbot is an extremely important and well-known regional artist who continues to be sought after for his specialty in oil portraits. The mural is typical of WPA work being done during the 1930's and the subject matter typical of the period as it depicts the tobacco town which Lynchburg was. Abbot recalls that the location, size and general nature of the mural were "selected by WPA officials." He remembers best the publicity given him afterward in The Iron Worker, a well-known and respected publication of The Lynchburg Foundry Company. (Photograph and magazine clipping included)

C. Site:

The building faces the northeast. To the right of the building is Monument Terrace which was built in 1925, altered and completed for dedication in 1926. Monument Terrace includes Charles Keck's doughboy monument to the war dead and a series of terraces (in the Italian Renaissance style with dolphins and turtles as decoration) which ascend to Court Street and are capped by the 1875 Court House.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Architectural drawings of the 1909 building and each renovation are located in the present City Hall.
- B. Early views: Photograph of a 1933 view is included.
- C. Bibliography:
 - 1. Primary sources:
 - a. Chambers, Allen. Lynchburg: An Architectural History, University of Virginia Press, at press 1981.
 - b. Copy of cover and story in The Iron Worker, Spring 1935, a publication of The Lynchburg Foundry Company
- D. Likely sources not yet investigated:
 - Deed books of 1910
 - City council minutes of 1930's
 - Material in collection of Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Virginia
- E. Supplemental Material
 - Copy of cover and story in The Iron Worker, Spring 1935, a publication of The Lynchburg Foundry Company

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